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ABSTRACT

This paper situates the notion of foreign language (FL) standards within a larger culture of standardization grounded in (1) the context of FL education, (2) the larger political and educational context of standards based reform and standardized assessment, and (3) the pervasive linguistic culture and ideology associated with the notion of standard language. The paper points out three features of the ideology and culture of standardization that are most relevant to education in general, particularly FL education (nativeness, monolingual exclusivity, and the quality of the language). It then focuses on the overt politicization in policy terms that has put the topic of standards in education at the top of the list of educational and legislative priorities and the covert depoliticization in ideological terms of the idea of standard as a necessary, even natural, component of educational quality and reform. The paper concludes with a discussion of a critical culture of FL and heritage language education. It suggests that problematizing the culture of standardization will move FL and heritage language education closer to becoming privileged inter-enriching sites of critical language awareness where reflection upon attitudes and ideologies empowers students and teachers to create complex linguistic and cultural identities as learners and speakers of two or more languages. (27 bibliographic references.) (SM)

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Foreign Language Standards, Standard Language and the Culture of Standardization: Some Implications for Foreign Language and Heritage Language Education

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Introduction

In this paper, I will situate the notion of foreign language (FL) standards within a larger culture of standardization grounded in 1) the context of FL education, 2) the larger political and educational context of standards-based reform and standardized assessment, and 3) the pervasive linguistic culture and ideology associated with the notion of standard language. In conclusion, I will say a word or two on the emerging critical culture of FL and heritage language (HL) education.

The Culture of standardization and Practices of variation

Contributions from diverse research traditions (including sociolinguistics, anthropology, sociology, education, and cultural theory) have problematized the notion of the idealized native standard speaker (e.g., Bakhtin 1981; Valdman 1982; Milroy and

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Milroy 1991; Crowley 1989; Lodge 1993; Kramsch 1997; Schieffelin, Woolard, & Kroskrity 1998). The disjunct between what is thought, or assumed, to be the language (that is, the native standard language) and language practices as they can be observed in a variety of contexts has led to a multidisciplinary view of standard language as an ideology grounded in a linguistic culture (Schiffman 1996) with significant sociocultural, political and pedagogical implications. For example, sociolinguist James Milroy (2001) observes that speakers of standard languages can be said to live in "standard language cultures" in which

> Certain languages, including widely used ones such as English, French and Spanish, are believed by their speakers to exist in standardized forms, and this kind of belief affects the way in which speakers think about their own language and about 'language' in general. (530)[1]

The standard language is ideologically constructed by means of an ongoing sociocultural and sociolinguistic process of standardization (Joseph 1987; Milroy and Milroy 1991) involving the codification and institutionalization of the dominant linguistic and cultural norms of the "educated native speaker". Standardization institutionalizes a set of evaluative and affective stances toward practices of variation in opposition to a standardized language and its attendant culture (i.e. the ideological construct of a unitary language). These perceptions or misperceptions of variability are operative on the level of individual and collective beliefs, as well as on a policy level that influence political and educational decisions concerning language.

This is not the place to examine language standardization in all its complexity. Instead, I will point out three features of the ideology and culture of standardization that are most relevant to education in general and to foreign language education in particular.

Nativeness

First is nativeness. The standard language has been characterized by sociolinguists as no one's native language insofar as it is a cultural endowment with functions that cannot be mastered until after the period of normal first-language acquisition (Joseph 1987: 17). Although the standard language is no one's native language, it comes to define in ideological terms the language of native speakers with respect to what Benedict Anderson (1991) has called the "imagined" communities known as nations.[2] This ideologized nativeness, that is, the seemingly simple, but highly problematic, identity between one's native language, culture and the standard language, is at the heart of standardization. In diachronic terms, standardization is the process of language-making attached to "the language myth" (Harris 1981), by which elite norms have come to define over time what constitutes "the language" of the nation, the empire, its citizens and its schools. The standardization process confers privileged native-speakership on the users of the standard language.

Monolingual Exclusivity

"The language" is the locus of exclusive monolingual identity, both collectively and individually. Within this one-nation-one-language-one-culture-one-self view, bilingual and multilingual identities are seen as threats to the unitary structures of language, nation, culture, and self. In response to the undeniable existence of linguistic

and cultural diversity, the monolingual exclusivity of the standard positively values bilingualism only in terms of what Monica Heller (1999) has called "parallel bilingualisms", that is, speakers will ideally move from one monolingual standard norm to another monolingual standard with none of the practices of variation (such as language mixing or codeswitching) that have been so abundantly documented in actual bilingual discourse, particularly in minority language situations. Such attitudes are institutionalized in the educational systems of ideologically monolingual nations, such as France, the United States, and Mexico. As Lourdes Ortega has pointed out, For FL professionals and society at large, "the preferred route to bilingualism is that of a monolingual speaker of an L1 learning the L2 from zero as an adult, and the ideal goal is eventually to be able to 'pass for' a monolingual speaker of the learned language" (Ortega 1999: 249).

The Quality of the Language

Individual and collective attitudes as to the quality of the language (Eloy 1995; Heller 1999) and, presumably the language learning experience (i.e., acquisition), and instructional practices/approaches to teaching the language (i.e., pedagogy) are based on the knowledge and use of standard language, such that the "successful" learners are those who have "mastered" the standard language. Given that mastery of the standard is unevenly distributed in society, the underlying tacit assumption is that **quality** is a function of linguistic and cultural **inequality**. In this sense, the notion of standard language is a sociocultural reaction to variation in language-culture practices attached to ideologically constructed categories in society (such as educated vs. uneducated; middle-class vs. working-class; White vs. non-White; foreign vs. native, etc.).

The Political and Educational Context of Standards-based Reform and Standardized assessment

The culture of standardization has been most visible in terms of language and schooling, where standardness seems to remain the most universally legitimate value, as evidenced by the mounting rhetoric surrounding standards in education. Educational standards like standard languages are ideological in that they represent a worldview of language and society in which variation is problematic.

The larger political and educational context of standardization has been characterized by, on the one hand, an overt politicization in policy terms that has put the topic of standards in education at the top of the list of educational and legislative priorities. On the other hand, the politicization of standards operates in tandem with a covert depoliticization in ideological terms of the idea of standard as a necessary, even natural, component of educational quality and reform.

Covert Depoliticization

Standards in education have become naturalized, in ideological terms, in dominant "common sense" and unassailable cultural assumptions. For example, Diane Ravitch has distilled the idea of standard in the following terms: "a standard is both a goal (what should be done) and a measure of progress toward that goal (how well it was done)" (Ravitch 1995: 7). This essentializing and naturalizing view of standards fosters a depoliticization of the idea of standard as a legitimized measure of quality that somehow rises above the obvious political and social function of a standard as a symbol in what is often perceived as a battle or struggle between good and bad practices, in

both educational and linguistic terms. In particular, this depoliticized definition of standards has involved the problematic categories of **content** standards and **performance** standards. For example, the National FL Standards have been articulated as content standards, that is, the FL profession's "best judgment of what students should know and be able to do as a result of their study of world languages" (Phillips 1999: 2). While these content standards are acknowledged as the basis for the development of performance standards, the content/performance distinction nevertheless serves to ideologically frame curricular standardization as a neutral process of professional consensus building distanced from the often controversial and politicized job of testing.

Overt Politicization

However, in the political arena, standardization in education is all about testing. Ever since the 1890's when reformer Joseph Mayer Rice introduced what may have been the first test to be administered to a larger national sample (in spelling) (Ravitch 1995: 46), linguistic standardization, in Mayer Rice's case, of morphological and lexical forms in orthography, and standardized assessment have come together as a prominent feature of education in the United States. More recently, legislative acts, such the 1994 Educate America Act, or Goals 2000, have called for student achievement by development of the recommended goals and standards in the core subjects, including foreign languages. This type of politicization has resulted in content standards, such as the National FL Standards, and performance standards. Standards have found their legitimacy in reflecting, as Marc Tucker has described it, a "broad consensus on what is truly important", starting with the "widely held view" that the capacity to use the

conventions of language and "demonstrate a command of good grammar and good diction are essential basics around which the rest of the standards must be built" (Tucker and Codding 1998: 57).

Gregory Cizek (2001) has recently hypothesized that the rise in performance standard setting has developed as "an incidental technology necessitated by the legislation of high stakes testing in education" (6). Cizek further conjectures that "a precipitating force" in standard setting was "the (real or perceived) inability of educators to serve a gatekeeping function by making accurate and dependable discriminations in student performance as evidenced by the widely perceived phenomenon of grade inflation and the public discomfort with the meaning of a high school diploma that surfaced in the 1970s." (Cizek 2001: 13)

The gatekeeping function of standardization, both in the standard language–culture construct and in standardized assessments based on that construct, clearly devalues variation. In socially and linguistically stratified societies, as in California, gatekeeping can be seen as an ideological stance toward the speakers and/or communities identified with non-standard and non-native (i.e., non-English) language-culture practices. The recent debate over the use of standardized tests in admissions to the University of California raises some important issues pertaining to the relationship between standardization and foreign language education.

In October of 2001, the University of California's Office of the President released a report on the Predictive Validity and Differential Impact of the SAT I and SAT II tests at the University of California that purports to explore the fairness and equity issues of standardized testing in college admissions. The report reveals a number of interesting between-group variations in student performance on the three SAT composites, that

the SAT I, the SAT II writing and math tests, and the SAT II Third Test. The analysis of the data found that

> Finally, while Asian American applicants score better than average and Chicano/Latino worse than average on all three SAT composites, both groups score best on the SAT II composite that includes UC and the SAT Third Subject Test. The latter pattern undoubtedly reflects the influence of the language tests. (Geiser and Studley 2001: 14-15).

The authors of the report also note that the racial/ethnic dimension of the proposal to eliminate the SAT I in favor of achievement tests such as the SAT II has become "a lightning rod for speculation and debate" centering on the content of the Third Test of the SAT II:

1. Some, for example, view the SAT II Third Subject Test as giving an unfair "language advantage" for Chicano/Latino and Asian American students, on the grounds that it is inappropriate for native speakers of a language to take an achievement test in that same language.
2. Others question why this rule should not also apply to native speakers of English.
3. Still others view mastery of a second language, however acquired, as an important academic asset that students should be allowed to demonstrate. (Geiser and Studley 2001: 22)

All of these divergent points of view hinge on a certain relationship between ideologies of language and standardized testing of language. First, it is not clear how much of a

language advantage exists for the students who chose the SAT II subject test that supposedly corresponds to their native language. Much evidence points toward significant sociolinguistic differences between the putatively native language of the vast majority of Spanish speakers and the standardized and testable Spanish of the SAT II used to measure mastery and proficiency. Moreover, the relative scarcity of literacy instruction in Spanish for native speakers (a situation exacerbated by the 1998 Proposition 227 banning bilingual education in California) makes it quite unlikely that more than a very few native Spanish speakers have command of the standard or hyperstandard Spanish of the tests. The situation is no less dramatic for Asian American a student for whom literacy in their native Asian language, or languages, has been systematically denied by public education in CA.[3]

The very definition of a native speaker in, say, Chinese (one of the SAT II Third test options) is highly problematic. Given the complex sociolinguistic situation in Asia and the US, the native Chinese speaker is assumed to both literate and fluent in Mandarin. But where does that leave the majority of the native Chinese speakers in the high school where I teach who have had little if any literacy instruction in Chinese (usually in private or weekend language schools) and speak Cantonese and/or a number of other Chinese languages at home, as well as Vietnamese in some cases. And my Filipino students? I know of no SAT II exam in Filipino (the Tagalog-based national language of the Philippines). But even if there were one, the remarkable degree of multilingualism and sociolinguistic diversity among my Filipino students (many of whom are familiar with one or more of the 8 officially designated major vernacular languages of the Philippines, including Tagalog, Ilokano, and Cebuano; see Gonzalez

1998) would inevitably conflict with the standardized Filipino that would probably be selected for any future SAT II test.

As far as native English speakers' performance on the SAT II writing test, many of my African-American students are bitterly disappointed, even demoralized, by their scores that, apparently reflect the fact that native-ness in language seems to correlate with middle-class whiteness. Although the official discourse prefers to frame college admissions in terms of "fairness", "equity", and "opportunity", a more critical approach conceptualizes the question in terms of a dynamic of inclusion and exclusion based at least in part on standardized forms of language and culture.

As far as mastery of a second language, however acquired, being an important academic asset that students should be allowed to demonstrate...It appears that "mastery" in a school setting is essentially defined in terms of standard-ness residing in a socially-situated native standard speaker. Earlier this year the University of California's Board of Admissions and Relations with Schools (BOARS) made public a discussion paper on "The Use of Admissions Tests by the University of California". However, the BOARS paper engages in an interesting depoliticization of standardized language testing and standard language education in concluding that "the question of variations in scoring patterns and prediction for the language examinations requires further study" (pg. 13) given that the "question of the foreign language examinations is quite complex both educationally and statistically" (pg. 12). As if language testing and language education were only an *educational* and *statistical* matter, not a political one!

Nevertheless, among its policy recommendations, BOARS declared that an "admissions test should be a reliable measurement that provides uniform assessment and should be fair across demographic groups", as well as "measure levels of mastery

of content in UC-approved high school preparatory coursework" (pg. 15). Within a culture of standardization, this ideological stance toward the **uniformity of assessment** and the measurement of quality and mastery would not only insist on the monolingual norms attached to standard language, but possibly even deny those few bilingual and multilingual heritage speakers who have mastered those norms from being allowed to show that they have—in "fairness", ostensibly, to those unfortunate English-monolingual learners of Spanish who have to compete with the droves of native Spanish speakers that threaten, supposedly, to overrun our UC campuses. Within this discourse of equity and opportunity, "fairness" comes to be equated with gatekeeping. And war is peace. I anxiously await the day when our UC's will reflect our state's native Spanish speaking population. In the meantime, I desperately hope that at least a handful of the native Spanish speakers in my high school classes will be admitted to a UC.

The recent change in UC admissions testing policy from aptitude (SAT I) assessment to achievement based (SAT II, and call for new achievement assessments) has shifted the burden of determining quality back onto the high schools, which are coming under increasing pressures to create standardized curricula. A sort of circular trend whereby perceptions of variation by gatekeepers with respect to the performance and potential of high school graduates is channeled back on the K-12 system in the form of new standardized assessments of student achievement.

Given the culture of standardization, standards in their various manifestations have been seen as the only viable response to the perception that there exists excessive variation in student performance, in educator competence, in grading practices, and in

curricula. Among educators, much of the questioning of the most egregious standards-based curricula and assessment has involved a redefinition of the term "standard" as, say, New Standards (e.g., Tucker & Codding 1998) which do not seem to challenge the underlying assumption that quality must be standardized and that variation is the root cause of poor quality education. This sort of ideological positioning of variability leaves little room for alternative definitions of quality that place variability at the center of the educational enterprise in positive and meaningful ways.

Conclusion: Towards A Critical Culture of FL and Heritage Language Education.

As somber as the picture that I have painted may seem, it also opens up the possibility for engaging in critical counter dialogues with the dominant ideology of standardization. The SAT Third test controversy is an opportunity to work toward what Claire Kramsch (1993) has called "a critical third place" where language study is an initiation into a kind social practice that is at the boundary of two or more cultures and languages and that questions the binary logic of modernity embedded in the native standard language-culture construct. The project of making FL and heritage language education a privileged site of critical language-culture awareness must involved the exploration of the very real and often conflicted experiences with language and culture that all of our students, as actors in standard language cultures, bring with them to our FL and heritage language classes. From a critical sociocultural and sociolinguistic perspective, "the Spanish" or "the French", or "the Chinese" of the FL or heritage language classroom is an artifact produced by standardization. Rather than viewing standardization and the standard language as an immutable cultural given, a critical perspective offers a framework in which teachers and students may question the validity and usefulness of this construct.

Increasingly, FL and heritage language education has acknowledged concerns for incorporating sociolinguistic variation and cultural diversity into the pedagogical construct of language and culture in order to provide sociolinguistically and socioculturally complex views of language and culture that go beyond the monolingual exclusivity embedded in the native standard language. These views recognize the real

and rather obvious bilingualism and multilingualism of students on societal and individual levels (Pérez-Leroux & Glass 2000; Villegas Rodgers & Medley 2001).

Critical awareness of the ideologized nativeness of standard languages is basic, in my view. Understanding practices of variation associated with societal and individual bilingualism and multilingualism and their relationship to the native standard speaker offers a space for critical awareness. Critical exploration and reflection in FL and heritage language education should look at

1. the sociolinguistic, sociocultural, and discursive variation found in native speaker communities, particularly in bilingual and multilingual settings (e.g., native Spanish speakers in the United States);
2. and, variation in the production of non-native speakers (NNS) from the pedagogical and native-speaker norms.

This implies a problematization of the traditional pedagogical and research stances toward the emergent bilingualism and multilingualism of FL and heritage language students that have been defined with respect to the linguistic and cultural practices of idealized standardized "native" speakers in terms of (in)correctness, (in)accuracy, (in)appropriateness "error" and "interlanguage". Guadalupe Valdés (1999) identifies a certain "language bigotry" whereby instructors routinely question the language skills of non-native speakers, including the problematically (non)native speakers of the non-prestige varieties associated with Spanish-English bilingualism. The discourse practices of many of these speakers are stigmatized as "imperfect".

The field of Critical Language Awareness (CLA) also marks an attempt to problematize the notions of accuracy and appropriateness based on native-speaker norms that reflect only the language practices of a dominant group in society. Norman

Fairclough (1992), for example, notes that the theory and language of appropriateness coexists within a historically earlier and overtly normative model of variation based on the "correctness" of the standard language. Language awareness in the classroom, as Fairclough observes, tends to be uncritical because it admonishes students to become aware of their language production in order not to deviate from the standard. A more critical awareness of language, however, attempts to situate appropriateness within its historical and ideological context. CLA recognizes the tension that exists in language education between creative individual uses of language and conformity to institutionalized norms.

Given the trend to pass the responsibility for standardized educational quality back to the K-12 system, it is all the more important to understand standardization in its broad educational and social context. As Leo van Lier (2000) has observed, the *quality* of the students' experience in the second or foreign language is a fundamental educational issue that is not generally addressed by SLA research and pedagogy. From van Lier's ecological-semiotic perspective, the educational quality of what students get out of the language class is not necessarily the same as, and often opposed to, the quantitative assessment of the students' knowledge/learning measured with reference to standardized forms of knowledge. Researchers and educators, then, must critically examine how educational quality is related to standards in an effort to redefine the notion of teachable language as other-than-exclusively-native-and-standard. For example, educational quality in FL instruction defined in terms of L2 exclusivity (i.e., the exclusion of English, the putative L1 of foreign language learners in the United States) must now contend with, say, Ernesto Macaro's (2001) recent call for "optimality" in the use of codeswitching by the teacher.

In conclusion, it is my hope that problematizing the culture of standardization will move FL and heritage language education closer to becoming privileged inter-enriching sites of critical language awareness where active reflection upon attitudes and ideologies empowers students and teachers to create complex linguistic and cultural identities as learners and speakers of two or more languages.

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[1] Some of these beliefs include:

1. correctness (normativity),
2. monolingual exclusivity,
3. prestige,
4. homogeneity, abstraction and idealization of a language as a fixed object, "a stable synchronic finite state idealization" (Milroy 2001: 540),
5. boundedness ("determinate" languages) and discreteness of linguist varieties,
6. historicity,
7. legitimacy,
8. communicative efficiency of the standard, and
9. universalization and essentialization

[2] The ideological role of standard languages in the creation of modern national communities (i.e. nation-states) has been well documented, particularly by applied sociolinguists (e.g., Garvin and Mathiot 1968, Haugen 1966, Ray 1963, Stewart 1968, Kloss 1967) working in the field of language planning. More recently, research on standardization (Milroy and Milroy 1991; Joseph 1987; Crowley 1989; Lodge 1993) has taken a more critical, post-modern, stance toward the ideological premise of national unity and the socioeconomic and political construct that Etienne Balibar has named "la forme nation" (2001).

[3] In fact, President Atkinson has been reported in the Berkeley Daily Californian as acknowledging that "If you look at Hispanic students only about 50 percent take the foreign language exam as an option and if you look at Asian students...only about 22 percent take an Asian language examination" (Daily Cal, July 3, 2001).

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